

10 Tips for Talking to Elected Officials

The following tips were supplied by Lyn Hopper (www.lynhopper.com), the featured speaker during the Friends of South Carolina Libraries annual meeting in April 2011:

- 1. Library Trustees and Friends are worth 10 librarians.**
Librarians are seen as having a vested interest; Trustees and Friends are volunteers who are trying to make the community better.
- 2. Your efforts must be in concert with your library director.**
Work with your director to develop an advocacy plan and a consistent message. This cannot be overemphasized.
- 3. Lobbying is not just at budget time.**
Meet with your legislators at home, invite them to library events, and stay in touch year round. Thank them frequently for what they do for your library.
- 4. Know exactly who you need to talk to.**
Who can influence the result you want? Sometimes a legislative aide is the key person.
- 5. Be specific with "the ask."**
What specific action do you need your legislator to take? How many dollars do you need for your project?
- 6. Talk about the private funds that will match the government funding.**
Will the money you are requesting be an incentive for getting more grants or financial support from private donors and foundations?
- 7. Help library supporters by sending action alerts.**
These give details about the needs and ensure that your message and timing are consistent.
- 8. Be useful! How can you help the busy legislator with information needs?**
Libraries are in the information business. Make your connection to your elected official a profitable one for him or her.
- 9. Don't bore your funding authorizes.**
A quote from *Getting Political* by Anne M. Turner: "The fire chief can afford to bore people to death - nobody challenges the need for a fire department. Libraries and their supporters cannot."
- 10. Have fun!**
Politicians are people too. Find opportunities to interact casually as well as in formal presentations. Keep a friendly demeanor and use humor when appropriate.